

Item 2.

Community Services Grant - Funding to Address Homelessness in the Inner City

File No: S116523

Summary

The City of Sydney's 24th bi-annual street count on 18 February 2020 counted 343 people sleeping rough across the local area, and 505 people occupying crisis and temporary accommodation beds. The number of people sleeping rough in the city has been slowly decreasing since 2017 as a result of an increase in outreach services funded through the 2017-2020 Community Services Grant from the City to Specialist Homelessness Services via the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (the Department).

While primary responsibility for homelessness rests with state government, the City has responded to homelessness for over 35 years; linking people sleeping rough with services, managing the impacts of rough sleeping in the public domain, and providing sector leadership and coordination. The City works in partnership with NSW Government agencies and Specialist Homelessness Services to provide collaborative outreach to people sleeping rough. In the last financial year, more than 180 people were supported to exit homelessness.

Over the past three years, the City has contributed a total of \$3.5 million in funding to the Department to contribute to the delivery of Specialist Homelessness Services in the inner city, including:

- \$700,000 per annum to fund assertive outreach and post crisis support services delivered by Neami Way2Home;
- \$300,000 per annum to provide service coordination and brokerage for young people delivered by Launchpad Youth Community, and;
- \$200,000 per annum to fund culturally Specific Outreach Services provided by Innari Housing and the Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Service.

The current funding agreement with the Department ends on 30 June 2020. The services delivered by Neami Way2Home, Launchpad, and Innari Housing have delivered positive outcomes. The Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Service is working with the City and the Department to improve performance and outcomes. Not all funds allocated to this service have been expended.

The Department has requested that the City continue funding these services for a further 12 months. The extension of current arrangements will give the City and the Department time to reassess the needs of the community and establish the best method of funding going forward, particularly in light of potential service and sector changes as a result of COVID-19. The request was assessed under the Community Services Grant Program.

The City will play an active role in setting service specifications, developing performance measures and actively monitoring the services provided with these funds in partnership with the NSW Government.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a cash grant to NSW Department of Communities and Justice of \$1.2 million (excluding GST) for the delivery of specialist homelessness services in the inner city during the 2020/21 financial year; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer an agreement with NSW Department of Communities and Justice in respect of the cash grant outlined in(A) above and roll over any funds yet to be expended and allocate to specialist homelessness services delivering positive outcomes.

Attachments

Nil

Background

1. The City of Sydney's 24th bi-annual street count on 18 February 2020 counted 343 people sleeping rough across the local government area and 505 people occupying crisis and temporary accommodation beds. The number of people sleeping rough in the city has been slowly decreasing since 2017 as a result of an increase in outreach services funded through the 2017-2020 Community Services Grant from the City to the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.
2. The factors that contribute to homelessness are complex and no single organisation can address homelessness alone. The City of Sydney has had a strong commitment to responding to homelessness for over 35 years and works in partnership with NSW Government agencies and specialist homelessness services to respond to homelessness in the inner city. This includes providing collaborative outreach support to people sleeping rough. During the last financial year, this collaboration supported more than 180 people to exit homelessness.
3. The City's Draft Homelessness Action Plan outlines the City's ongoing role in responding to homelessness and rough sleeping in the city. Public exhibition of the action plan closed in February and submissions are currently being reviewed.
4. Between 2017 and 2020, the City has provided \$3.5 million to the NSW Department of Communities and Justice for the delivery of specialist homelessness services in the inner city. In May 2017, Council resolved to provide:
 - (a) \$700,000 per annum to fund assertive outreach and post crisis support services delivered by Neami Way2Home;
 - (b) \$300,000 per annum for a youth-specific services, comprising brokerage funds administered by Launchpad Youth Community in partnership with 19 other services; and
 - (c) \$200,000 per annum to provide culturally specific assertive outreach in the inner city delivered by the Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Services and Innari Housing.
5. In the 2017/18 financial year, \$1.1 million funding was provided to the Department of Communities and Justice to fund Neami Way2Home, Launchpad Youth Community, Innari Housing and the Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Services, and \$1.2 million per annum during 2018 to 2020.
6. The current funding agreement with NSW Department of Communities and Justice ends on 30 June 2020.
7. The NSW Department of Communities and Justice has announced that State Government funding arrangements established in 2017 with a range of specialist homelessness services and outreach services will be continued for a further year to allow sufficient time for the recommissioning process, and an assessment of service delivery.
8. A further one year of funding will ensure services funded through the City are in line with services supported directly by the Department of Communities and Justice. A further one year of funding will also ensure any changes required as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and any opportunities to reassess Key Performance Indicators, are incorporated into new funding arrangements from 2021-22 onwards.

9. The City has received a written request from NSW Department of Communities and Justice seeking a continued financial contribution for the 2020-21 financial year towards these services.
10. The request was assessed under the Community Services Grant program. The application was assessed by the Manager Social Programs and Services, Manager Grants, and Manager, Social Policy and Programs.
11. The service delivery outcomes achieved through the current grant and the details of the NSW Department of Communities and Justice request for further funding are detailed below.

Assertive outreach

12. The first service for which NSW Department of Communities and Justice is seeking the City's support is the assertive outreach service provided by Neami Way2Home.
13. The current funding agreement sees the City contribute \$600,000 per annum to Neami Way2Home through the Department. Funding focuses on:
 - (a) engaging clients with complex needs who are sleeping rough, where outreach workers directly engage with clients on the streets offering assistance and case management;
 - (b) working in partnership with health services, general practitioners and other services to address the needs of the chronically homeless; and
 - (c) ensuring a Housing First approach, which focuses on helping clients access and sustain long-term supported housing solutions.
14. Over the three-year funding period, Neami Way2Home has met its funding requirements and delivered positive outcomes. Across 2017-19 the service supported 170 adults sleeping rough to access stable housing with ongoing support.
15. Neami Way2Home also receives \$100,000 per annum to enhance post-crisis support for people housed. Neami Way2Home has used this funding to investigate referral pathways for smooth transitions to housing and for additional frontline post-crisis support where required.
16. One of the key features of the service offered by Neami Way2Home is the provision of both outreach services and post-crisis support. Support for assertive outreach is directly aligned with the City's priorities in responding to homelessness and assisting people who are sleeping rough to exit homelessness. Continuing to provide funding to Neami Way2Home will enable the service to maintain the level of assertive outreach delivered over the past three years in the inner city.
17. It is proposed that for the period 2020-21, the City provide \$700,000 per annum to Neami Way2Home, comprised of \$600,000 to enable the organisation to maintain assertive outreach services and \$100,000 to enhance post-crisis support services.

Preventing young people from becoming homeless

18. The second service for which the NSW Department of Community and Justice has requested further funding is a service to prevent youth homelessness, as part of the Inner City Homelessness Prevention and Support Service for Young People through Launchpad Youth Community.
19. Young people who first experience homelessness before the age of 18 are more likely to experience persistent homelessness in adulthood. Pathways into homelessness for young people may include family breakdown and being in foster care. Being able to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place, or stopping them from becoming entrenched in homelessness, helps give them the best chance in life.
20. Brokerage is funding for services to prevent young people from becoming homeless including bond, housing establishment such as furniture, emergency transport, accommodation, medical support, mental health support, reconnection with family members and education.
21. Currently, the City provides \$300,000 per annum for case coordination and brokerage to provide flexible support to prevent young people with complex needs from becoming homeless or entrenched in homelessness. Launchpad Youth Community administers these funds.
22. The service has met its funding requirements and exceeded expectations in the delivery of outcomes for young people. In 2018-19, the service prevented 204 young people from becoming homeless, and supported 138 young people who were homeless to access safe and stable housing.
23. It is proposed that the City provide funding of \$300,000 to Launchpad to maintain and enhance service coordination and brokerage for young people.

Aboriginal outreach services

24. The third service for which NSW Department of Communities and Justice is requesting funding is Aboriginal outreach services.
25. Approximately fifteen per cent of people sleeping rough in inner Sydney surveyed during the 2019 Connections Week Survey identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making up only one per cent of the City of Sydney residential population.
26. Both the Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Service and Innari Housing have provided outreach services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since 2017.
27. Both Innari Housing and Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Service have met their funding requirements. In 2018-19, together the services provided 345 engagements with people sleeping rough who identify as Aboriginal. They also assisted 30 people into permanent accommodation.
28. It is proposed that the City provide funding of \$200,000, comprising \$100,000 to the Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Service and \$100,000 to Innari Housing for the delivery of Aboriginal-specific outreach services.

Grant management and acquittal

29. The Department of Communities and Justice manages all grants directly with recipients on an ongoing basis and sets Key Performance Criteria with recipients.
30. City staff meet with the Department of Communities and Justice monthly to discuss the progress recipients are making against Key Performance Criteria. City staff also meet jointly with the Department of Communities and Justice and each grant recipient on a quarterly basis.
31. Performance of services is closely monitored by both the Department of Communities and Justice and the City, and supports are provided where necessary or requested. Any performance issues are raised and discussed in meetings with the Department and the City or with grant recipients as required.
32. Reports outlining acquittal of funds, and progress against Key Performance Indicators are provided to the City by the Department of Communities and Justice at the end of each reporting period. As the reporting period for the current grant has not yet ended, acquittals have not been completed, however, all services are on track to meet their Key Performance Indicators and have met these for all previous reporting periods.
33. Way2Home and Launchpad's Key Performance Indicators require them to report on the number of people housed, and Launchpad also reports on the number of people assisted out of homelessness. Innari Housing and the Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness and Rehabilitation Community Service report on the number of engagements.
34. There will be an opportunity to revisit Key Performance Indicators for grant recipients following the Department of Communities and Justice's overarching assessment of service delivery, and any changes as a result of COVID-19. It is not anticipated that any changes to Key Performance Indicators will be necessary or warranted for the coming 12 month period.

Key Implications**Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision**

35. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 8 - Housing for a Diverse Population Direction 8 - the grant funding provided to NSW Department of Communities and Justice will support better outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including access to long term housing and support.

Social / Cultural / Community

36. The proposed mix of funding for specialist homelessness services has been informed by evidence of trends in homelessness, including over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people amongst the rough sleeping population. Recommendations have also been informed by 'on the ground' observations of the collaborative services to people sleeping rough in the inner city, and where investment by the City could deliver the greatest impact in reducing and/or breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Economic

37. The reduction of street homelessness carries positive economic impacts across the inner city through the reduction of resources directed toward areas such as security; waste and cleansing; policing; and repeated provision of expensive health, corrective services and other welfare services.

Budget Implications

38. Provision for the allocation of funding for homelessness, including funding the NSW Department of Communities and Justice as outlined above, has been made in the draft 2020/21 operating budget.
39. Any funds yet to be expended from the previous contract will be rolled over into the new contract and allocated to specialist homelessness services delivering positive outcomes. These funds have been fully budgeted for in the draft 2020/21 operating budget.
40. A new funding agreement between the City and NSW Department of Communities and Justice will need to be developed. City staff will be involved in joint contract management for the overarching agreement with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, as well as for each of the organisations funded via the agreement.

Relevant Legislation

41. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW).

Critical Dates / Time Frames

42. The current grant provided to the NSW Department of Communities and Justice expires on 30 June 2020. To allow City staff adequate time to execute and administer a revised agreement with the Department of Communities and Justice, a decision by Council is required no later than the May meeting cycle.

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Director City Life

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